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HER BUNNY



HARRIET A. CHEEVER



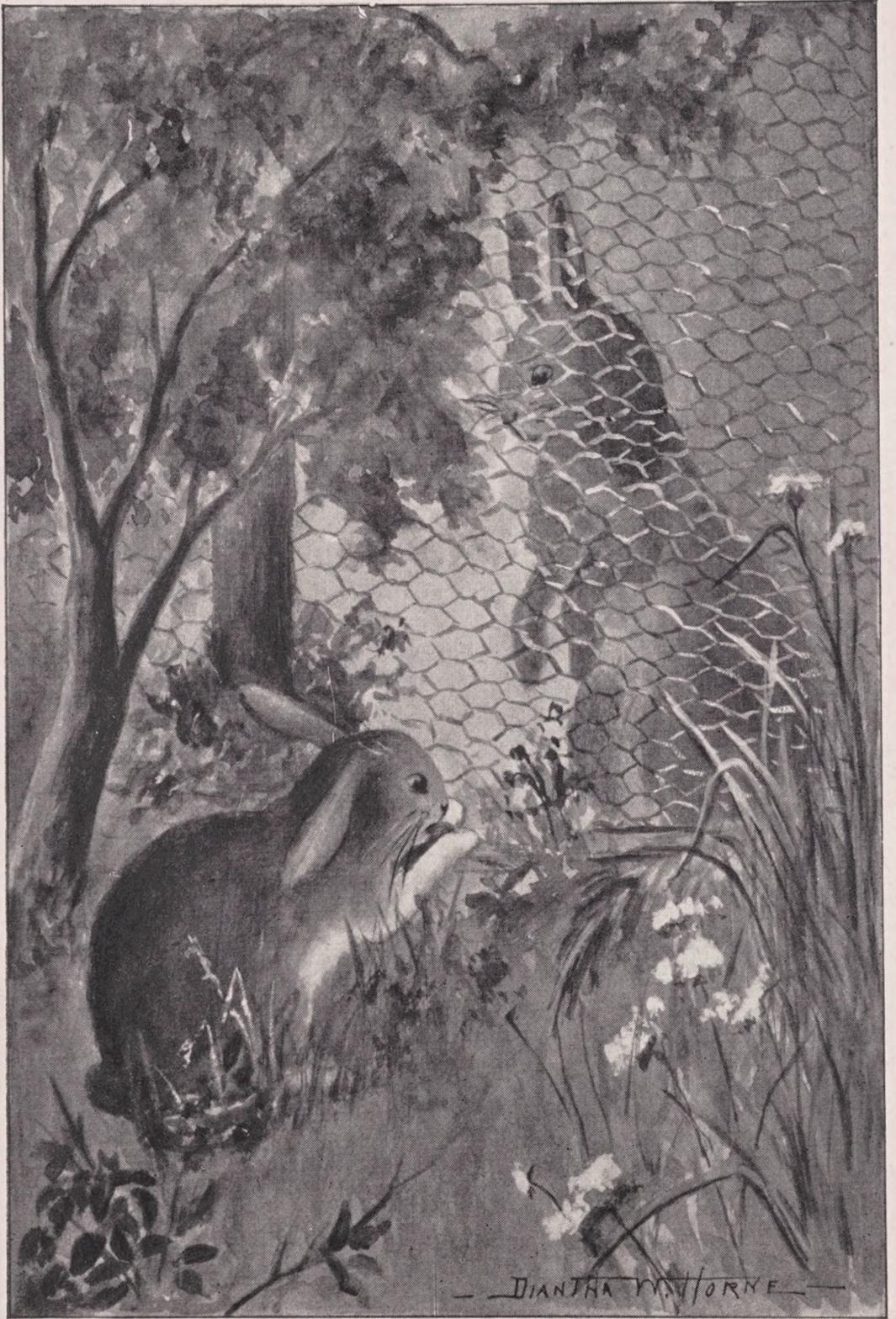
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MOTHER BUNNY



“ MISTER RABBIT WATCHED ME WITH EAGER, ANXIOUS
EYES ”

MOTHER BUNNY

BY

HARRIET A. CHEEVER

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"THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF BILLY TRILL,"

"MADAME ANGORA," "LORD DOLPHIN," ETC.

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Illustration of a rabbit's face in a dotted pattern.

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MOTHER BUNNY

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MOTHER BUNNY

CHAPTER I.

LIFE UNDERGROUND

GOOD morning, Boy. So you are getting well, and think it great sport to come over here to the edge of the woods every day and call on me.

Of course you didn't know until just now that I could talk so you could understand. It may be you are dreaming, and only imagine that you hear me talking. But no, your eyes are wide open, and I don't believe in mere dreaming when any one's eyes are roaming around everywhere.

Yes, my home is in the woods close by, but excuse me, Boy, I had rather not tell exactly where. You may be very nice and kind, but I have known creatures like you that run on only two legs, and have their paws — oh, excuse me again! — I mean, have their hands at the end

of what they call "arms," who would hunt down a Mother Bunny, destroy her burrow, and steal her young.

Certainly! my home is called a burrow, because it is a mere hole in the ground. At least, that is what it would look like to you. Not being a Rabbit, with four legs and four paws, you could not very well see the inside of my house without pulling it all to pieces. But it is a very snug, cosy place, I can assure you.

Ah! I see a sly look creeping into your eyes, which means you think it would be easy to follow me home sometime when you get stronger. You see, I know you, Boy! But very smart and spry any one would have to be on just two legs to follow me far.

And don't you suppose an experienced little old mistress like Mother Bunny has learned a thing or two about slyness for herself by this time?

Indeed, I should lead you a chase that would soon tire you out, were there any attempt at following me, and even then nothing would be learned. We have to learn slyness, we creatures of the field and meadow, for plenty there are of both animals and men, to say nothing of some great birds of the air, that would harm us in many ways were we not watchful and spry.

Really, I am very contented and happy. Here I have lived right in these woods for years. Most

of the Rabbits round and about know me well. When a question of importance comes up, Mother Bunny is very likely to be asked what she thinks about it.

So I have tried to grow wise in affairs, and now not only the Rabbits come to me with their stories of pleasure or of trouble, but there are other forest creatures that have got into the habit of inviting me to their homes and trusting me as a friend.

Did you think that the birds of the air, the insects that hum in the breeze, the animals large and small that run along the ground, and the fishes in the sea, were the only "dumb creatures," as they are sometimes called, that there are?

Oh, you are mistaken, Boy. There are lots and lots of active creatures that live *in* the earth, under its surface, have their homes and rear their families there, many of them seldom coming out into the light except to find food, and sometimes material for building. But we Bunnies often run about.

Isn't it fun? We think it is. As long as we escape being harmed during the day, we feel very safe at night. Storms do not reach us. Hunters are not much abroad in the darkness. True, we sometimes suffer from other dwellers underground that are larger or fiercer than ourselves, but that does not often happen.

We hide our nests. Some One has taught us skill in casting up twigs, making screens of network, and in various ways concealing the entrances to our homes. I am five years old, and although I have had some pretty hard fights, I never have had a burrow destroyed, not really destroyed.

Perhaps you wonder from whence I came, or where my family was first known and bred.

In Spain, if you please. I know this from having heard men say that the Rabbit family came from way across the ocean and the Spanish main. But now we are found almost everywhere, both in Europe and in this broad land.

What do you say? You should much like to see my house? No, that is one thing I must be very firm about, for were I to take you to my door, all you could see would be just the entrance and a little peep into the hall. Boys' eyes were not made to see into Mother Bunny's chambers, and it is well they were not.

Do you ask how many children I have had? Over a hundred. What a roar! If you laugh like that I sha'n't know about going on. And if it seems almost impossible to believe that one small object has been so much a mother, and cared for so many children, please remember that mother instinct and knowledge are very strong with nearly all creatures, and we Bunnies know how to care for our own.

In one part of my burrow is a snug little chamber where my babies are cared for. As my nest cannot be peeped into by your eyes, let me describe it.

Perhaps you think your hair mattress is the best bed in the world. Not so fast, boy! In my sheltered baby-room there used to be beds made from my own soft fur. I knew how to pluck it from my breast, and make the very softest bed known to man or beast. Feathers make a dainty couch on which to lie, but feathers, be they ever so downy, have little sticky quills; fur is fur, and nothing else; clear, soft down.

I raised one brood in another place than the burrow baby-chamber. For once, as I was preparing the Bunny baby-bed, I caught a Hare peeping around and watching me. Oh, the crazy, hateful creature! We are born sworn enemies, the Rabbits and the Hares.

I put our name foremost, not because I do not know better than to speak of myself or our kind first, but because I would not be seen or heard putting a Hare or one of the tribe before the Bunnies, when mentioning them together. Whenever we meet, we engage in a combat that is likely to finish one or the other.

What? You thought Rabbits and Hares were the same? No, no, Boy, do not think that any longer.

Hares are larger than we, have longer ears, longer feet, are more decidedly gray in color, and their ears are not as finely tipped with black as are ours. Don't say "Hare" to me very often. I couldn't stand it.

My goodness me! What do you think I saw with my own eyes one night? I saw a Hare make a slit in the breast of a cat!

"Fierce!" you exclaim. I should say so. Yet let me do justice even to an enemy.

Master Hare will go about in every kind of weather. If it thunders loud enough to stun you, and the lightning is just one streak and glare, if the rain is coming down as if faucets had been turned on in the sky, if hailstones thump and prick, Master Hare will go from place to place through it all if he takes a notion.

Or, if it is so cold it makes a Boy puff and blow merely to put his nose out-of-doors, it does not hinder Master Hare from taking a forest run. Or, should the snow be soft and deep so that plump goes his body into the cold mass, no matter, the Hare-man will hop right through it.

Oh, yes, the rascal has plenty of courage, I'll say that for him. Moreover, he has a temper of his own, and let him get either vexed or wounded, and the cry he will set up! It goes right through your head.

But I was speaking a moment ago of catching

a Hare-thing spying on me at one time when I was making a bed for baby Rabbits. He took himself away when I turned toward him, not that he was afraid, but he was not quite sure of my having seen him, and, oh, yes! great sport it would be for him to come around some day when I was absent, rumple up my nice little bed, and perhaps kill my poor babies.

You see, the baby Hares come into the world all dressed, their eyes open, and able to run about. As soon as they feel hunger, they munch around and find food for themselves. The mother lives in what is called a "form," a mere shallow hole or slump in the ground, and that is where her babies first see the light.

Now my tender little dears came into a soft, fur nest, and were without clothing at first, except a few straggling hairs here and there. Their eyes were not open for five or six days, and they could not run a step on their delicate little feet.

So I brooded over them for a few days, and soon the fur would begin coming out beautifully all over them. In about a week they began feeling their feet, and began peering about the nest, as cunning little babies in fur as one need wish to see.

And you will understand, Boy, why it was needful that I should have a clean, dry nest, when I

tell you that wet or dampness will soon kill a Bunny-boy, so I must always find a perfectly dry place in which to arrange my burrow.

I have to keep going back to the time when I saw that Hare-scamp peeping in at my baby-room. Some call it a "brood-chamber." I could have no rest or peace after seeing those unwelcome eyes peering about, so what do you think I did?

We do not often climb trees, but we can climb if we want to. And one day, when I heard a dog bark, — dogs are a great terror to Bunnies, — up I bounded to a low limb of an elm-tree, and while I was hiding there a gust of wind blew aside a mass of loose bark, fibre, and shreds, that had covered a large hole in the trunk of the tree.

"Now," I said to myself, "there would be a fine place for a nest if ever I should need one in a hurry, for I could easily keep a matted covering over the entrance, and feel quite safe."

So when I found that a cruel Hare had found what I was about, I caught up mouthfuls of hair at a time, ran secretly over to the elm-tree, and in the fine deep hollow that made a nice little chamber I soon had a soft, cosy bed neatly made.

It was very cold weather, but my little family of Bunnies were warm and comfortable in the heart of the great tree, where I nursed and tended them until they were ready to run about. Then,

one by one, I took them over to the old burrow or warren.

We do not readily give up a home. Oh, by no means. Several generations of Bunnies will keep the same warren. We add to it from time to time, often turning a corner underground, making a crooked passage, and, as we increase in numbers, we can all the better defend ourselves in case of attack.

Old Master Hare would have to look out for himself if I, my mate, and our children should "go for him."

My mate? Why, certainly, Boy. We are a perfectly respectable family of father, mother, and children. I have loved my children very much, and tended them faithfully. As for my mate and I, we cling to each other through all times and all weathers, find food for our family as long as it is necessary, and keep house with quite as much dignity and skill as most other creatures of the animal kingdom.

My last brood of Bunnies is nearly a year old, and it may be that before long they all will go to burrows of their own, setting up housekeeping with the mates they will choose, or that will choose them.

We live in our own burrow, — and you shall hear presently how the home was started, — a

family of nine, six children, their parents, and another member, of whom also you shall presently hear. Our other children visit us often, and we frequently have visiting friends.

CHAPTER II.

A RUN FOR FREEDOM

HOW happy you look, Boy. Ah! I see, we have been having what some of your old people call "a spell of weather," and it has been so damp and rainy you couldn't run to your seat on the broad stump, watch my movements, and listen to my story.

I thing you *did* fall a-dreaming after I had been talking to you the other day, for I heard you murmur:

"I wonder how such a handsome old Bunny happens to be wild." So let me explain:

Vanity is not a common trait with animals, and yet it seems as if we had a right to be proud of some things. But you see, vanity and pride are two different things. I have been very proud of some of my beautiful children. A mother should, perhaps, be proud of all her offspring alike, but when one of my fur totties would be particularly pretty, I'm afraid I felt a little extra pride over it.

Now more than once I have heard people speak of my beauty of person; yes, you may smile at the word "person" if you want to, but you see I must talk as people do in talking to one of the people; but if I have been possessed of beauty, it surely has proved a great snare. More than one trap has been set for me in particular. More than one Boy has chased me without mercy.

I have what hunters call a "butterfly face." My colors are gray, white, and black. It looks as though deep gray hair was parted on my forehead and turned back from my face. My nose and lips, making up the butterfly marking, are darkly tinted. My breast, sides, and legs are white as snow, while the top of my back runs almost into black. Around my neck is a mottled chain of dark gray and white. Once I heard a man exclaim:

"Ho! I would like to catch that Rabbit. Look at the arch of its back, will you? Stands up all of two inches above the head. See, it has a neck-lace on, and jolly! what a dewlap!"

That last meant the soft white pouch hanging beneath my throat. I know now, also, that a Rabbit, in order to have a perfect shape, should have a high, well-arched back.

I suddenly became scarce on hearing these remarks, and when soon afterward I saw a neat net arranged midst a tangle of brambles, I did not run into it.

Our burrows usually have several entrances, so that I can dart into a front, side, or back door, and yet be in the same old home. But you needn't put on that look of cunning, Boy, you won't find them.

Now I was not born in a wild, or natural, burrow. No, I was born in a hutch, or what is often called a "warren." I have spoken of my wild home underground as a warren, because I like to give a sound of what you call "civilization" to my home.

That, you see, is probably because I did not come into the world as a wild thing, but more as a civilized creature, and have since learned something of higher things than a mere wild state would have made me acquainted with.

See what honors you enjoy, Boy, in belonging to the "higher animal kingdom." Large talk for Mother Bunny, hey? Well, then, let me get back to my simple story, only I think it is but right to feel great thankfulness for being able to understand and to enjoy the very best there is to enjoy.

I lived, then, in a hutch with many others that were kept as "fancy Rabbits," and were to be sold to people who had fine grounds, and liked having rare little animals on them.

We have been great pets with people, especially with children, and more particularly with Boys. Many the Boy who has saved up money to buy

a Bunny or two, and many the good father who has allowed the coachman or the gardener to build a nice little Rabbit-house for the children. These houses are generally like little kennels, with a small space around them of very hard earth, so hard it would not be at all easy to burrow into. Then a high wire netting encloses the entire plot.

Great care is taken to prevent our escape from a hutch, and, being pets, we are watched pretty closely. But where we are kept to be sold, there is scarcely any such thing possible as getting away. Plenty of grass, nuts, and vegetables, leaves and parings, are given us to eat, and we have plenty of water to drink. We are visited and admired, but all this does not satisfy.

What we want is freedom. Freedom to whisk through field and woods, to find our own wild food, of nuts, roots, grass, and weeds. We do not drink much water, and moist, juicy foods are very harmful for us. In fact, wet or watery food would soon kill a Rabbit.

We know well enough what we want for fodder. And, mind you, the greatest fun of all is to romp through fine gardens at night, nip the sweet, beautiful corn, catch at celery tops, cabbage leaves, parsley, and other greens. Sweet clover is a nibbling delight, while pea and bean vines are very sweet also to our taste.

We can cut our food fine as we choose with our

sharp upper and lower front teeth, that serve us for knives or scissors. What if we do make a bit of mischief now and then in the vegetable garden? The farmer needn't complain. We often nibble the grass so close that it saves his mowing it, and we clear away more brush and briars than he thinks for.

The hutch that was my first home was kept by a "Bird and Rabbit Fancier." This means a man who makes a regular business of selling birds and Rabbits. Many of them he raises himself.

Really, Boy, there were some of the most beautiful Rabbits in that great hutch that I have ever seen. There were light grays, others of tortoise — tortus — shell, or yellow, black, and white, but although these were considered rare, I did not think them as pretty as some others. There were perfectly white ones, with pink eyes, and ears lined with delicate pink.

But most lovely and rare of all, were the "Albinos," with thick, fine, silky fur, pure white, and all of seven inches in length. Their eyes were also pink, and their ears pink lined. They sold for a "fancy price," and were well worth it.

Once in awhile an ordinary white Rabbit will have among a family of little new Bunnies just one of these long-furred, valuable Albinos.

Our hutch was a long, wide enclosure, divided off into several squares, was floored over with

boards, and the edges were tipped with tin, so afraid were the keepers that we would nibble our way through to the ground, and so escape. But earth was put over the boards, and grass was thickly strewn on top. We were kept clean, well-fed, and, above all, perfectly dry.

My first little family came to me in the hutch, and I am sorry to say the small dears would squabble now and then, do all I could to make them behave themselves and live peaceably. But they were soon sold away, and it would have been a grief were it not that so many little ones have needed my care, that no one Mother Bunny could keep the run of them all.

Many of the Rabbits, particularly the white ones, seemed to enjoy being constantly petted, and I truly thought they would as soon have remained captives as not. I have learned better since, and know that, so far as most of them were concerned, I was mistaken.

Yet there really were some that liked their life in the hutch, and were so tame that, after being allowed to run about the lawn, they would go willingly back into the warren, where they were sure of good beds and dry shelter, for each section of the warren had in it a regular little house where the Rabbits could escape the snow, rain, or too heavy a dew.

But I was discontented, and watched my chance

to run away. It did not come soon, for I think the keepers knew I wanted to escape, and kept a sharp eye on me.

One glad day, however, a young man came swinging toward the hutch, opened the little door, and, as he thought, closed it behind him. But he did not quite close it, and I managed to squeeze through.

I pressed my side so hard it hurt, and two or three others Rabbits, seeing I had got away, began squeezing as I had, to get out. The young man saw in a minute what they were up to, and quickly pulled back the fine fellow that in another instant would have been at liberty.

Alas, it was my mate! We had long understood, in our peculiar way of understanding, that should it ever be possible we would cut for freedom. And I had winked at him on starting for the little door. Had not several others been so eager to find themselves free, he might have been able to follow me. But there was no time to linger, even for a beloved mate.

As soon as the other Rabbits had been driven well into the hutch, and the door carefully closed, the careless young man rushed along the path, eager to catch and capture me. But I had made the best of the few moments' delay, and was very quickly hidden under a garden bench. His footsteps hurried past me as I lay concealed.

I knew as well as any one could have told me, that not until after the darkness fell would it be safe for me to venture out and — away for the woods! It must have been that my parents were wild Rabbits, for as soon as I knew anything, I began to long for freedom, and to live a wild, natural life.

My poor mate had the same longing. I had seen him spend hours, running first to one end of the enclosure, then the other, nosing about the carefully tinned edge, trying in vain to find a little space of earth, where he could, perhaps, pick his way through to the free life beyond.

We neither of us were ever allowed to go outside the hutch for a moment, probably because we were not tame, and the keepers were, I think, very quick to see which Rabbits were to be trusted with a bit of liberty, and which were not.

When it grew still and dark, I ventured forth. Oh, it seemed very strange. Think of it, Boy! It was the first time in my life — and I was over a year old — that I had ever been able to run about on the wild, free earth, skipping to and fro, and going wherever I pleased.

Was it any wonder that I was afraid? For afraid I was. It is my nature to be timid, anyway. Even in the hutch I was inclined to tremble and want to run away when the keeper came around. He knew how to handle us. He would

seize us by our pointed ears, holding the other hand under us, and would carry us from place to place without hurting in the least.

Yet I always feared him, and when, once in awhile, a dog would rush up to our cage-like home, and bark, although I knew he could not get through the wires, I would tremble as if I had the shakes, and nearly die of fright. At least, that was the way it seemed to me.

Then I had heard of woodchucks, skunks, and weasels, dreadful creatures that wander about after nightfall, and should I chance to meet one, alas, for poor Bunny!

So there I was under the rustic bench, and almost too much afraid to use the liberty so much longed-for and now gained. All at once I remembered something.

Not long before this, two fine-appearing men had visited the warren, and looked at us with much pleasure and interest. "Pretty creatures, aren't they?" said one.

"Yes," said the other, "and they do indeed look both innocent and helpless. You know the Greatest Book in the world says: 'The rocks are a refuge for the Conies,' and that 'The Conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks.'"

"These are not exactly Conies," said the first man.

“No, but they are doubtless of the same family as the little creatures called Conies in the Great Book,” said the other. “The Rabbits and the Conies are nearly the same, and both have been taught to build their houses underground and near the rocks. And then, there are those words about the ants.”

He repeated them, and I heard and remembered what was said of the ants, but just then they did not so much interest me as what he had said before. But all at once I took courage.

A great round moon was shining over the earth, making the path light, yet casting friendly shadows. For really the darkness favored me most, although just then both light and shade seemed to help me. The stars were all alight and burning brightly. I knew that far aloft in the trees thousands of birds were sweetly sleeping, their heads tucked under their wings.

Now the moon did not make itself. The stars did not set their own little lamps a-burning. The birds were not taking care of themselves, they were sound asleep and too little. Some One who was not asleep was watching; it must be so.

And surely if a poor Bunny wanted to find for herself a home, she would be guarded. If the Greatest Book in the world spoke of our cousins the Conies, and said that, for all they were a feeble folk, they knew enough to use the rocks for a

refuge, which means a place of safety, and to build them houses near or under the rocks, why, then, it was plain that for a rock I must scud, and there I would find me a place to build or to dig a home.

That was as far as a Rabbit's reasoning could go. But that was enough.

So, as I said, I became suddenly brave. Off I ran as fast as my nimble feet could carry me. I crossed the moonlit road, raced along by the grassy, shadowy edges, and reached the woods. Here I paused and looked around for a rock. Once I heard a scramble, and quickly hid under a stump. Then there was a whirr of strong wings, and an owl swooped by. But he saw nothing of little Mother Bunny, crouched down midst a lot of brown weeds.

Forth I started again, listened and ran, listened and ran. I would sit up on my haunches, fold over my fore paws, prick up my sharp ears, and listen for the least noise. I was young and timid then, and only half understood what I heard. Now I know the different sounds made by rustling leaves, squirrels, birds of prey, and mere harmless little creatures that buzz and hum. Then, everything startled me.

At length, well into the woods, I saw a great, mossy rock. I ran for it. Ha! down at its base was a soft, dry hollow. Gently, but in earnest,

I began to dig. Clumps of matted brush close by made fine hiding-places when I heard strange noises.

Pretty soon I had a hole large enough to creep into, and by scraping dry leaves near the top, could be completely hidden.

My home was only begun, but already it was a dear refuge, right under a great rock.

CHAPTER III.

A SHARP TRICK

FOR several days I worked diligently on my new house. The situation delighted me. Plenty of tangles, briars, and rubbish concealed the entrance, and I surprised myself with the amount of work I found could be done in a day. At night I crept forth, found tufts of thyme, wild strawberries, and sweet roots, in abundance.

At the end of two weeks I had a tunnel underground, well-lined with soft brush suitable for living or sleeping rooms. Everything was nice as could be, only — I was very lonely. I longed for my mate. And as the place under the rock began to look more and more like a home, I also began to realize what a lonesome, miserable thing it was to occupy a house alone.

True, I had seen other Rabbits, but they all had their own families, and beyond eyeing me curiously for a moment, they took no notice of me. But it was not my nature to want to live by myself, and I could no longer forget that it

is friends and companions that have to help make up a home.

I wonder, Boy, if you know the meaning of the hard word, gre-ga-rious. It means going in flocks or herds, or in the company of many others. Well, Rabbits are gregarious in their habits, and quite often it happens that the burrow of one family will cross the burrow of neighbors.

I must say, I prefer having a burrow to myself and my family, but I tell you these facts to show that it is not at all natural for Rabbits to want to live alone. So now that I no longer needed to work every hour of the day, I began to pine for my absent mate.

Yet right here let me tell you one thing. And it is something well worth remembering. There is nothing like work, good, steady, honest work, for taking up the mind and keeping troublesome thoughts in the background. If you put this fact right into a little cell of your memory, it may serve you finely, both while you are young, and when you have grown to be a man.

One night I asked myself seriously if I could not set my wits to work, and think up a plan for giving my mate the freedom I found so sweet, and that I knew he, poor fellow, was longing for more than ever.

And I did recall just one thing that looked like a gleam of encouragement. There was a weak

place in the wire netting down near the boarding, at a far corner of the hutch. But it was only a tiny little place, and Mister Rabbit and I had worked at it a number of times without doing the least bit of good.

Now I wondered if anything more could be done by working at it from the outside. Perhaps I might manage to get Mister Rabbit's help by being very cautious and sly. Then by our united efforts we might possibly pry up the weak wire, and so let my companion through.

Ah, but it was a perilous thing, even to think of! I remembered how I trembled the night of my escape, and how weak my legs felt as I ran over the ground and away from the hutch.

Up at the house was a great dog that could nab me and shake the life out of me in a moment. True, he had been trained never to dare touch one of the tame Rabbits when they were let loose, but a strange Bunny outside of the warren would be a different thing.

But Hero seldom left the piazza at night. That was where he was expected to stay, and did stay, usually, from the time the darkness fell until morning. Yet the dangerous road I must cross, the night-folk I must avoid, made me hesitate, hang back, and feel slow to venture.

But after nearly three weeks I could stand it

no longer, and resolved to set out that very night after midnight and see what I could do.

It was fine and starlight, but with no moon. I was glad of that; moonlight might show too much for a trip like mine. I reached the grounds safely. Hero was nowhere in sight. All was perfectly quiet inside the hutch. I waited a moment, then made a slight bleat. A pink nose was shoved out of a little wooden house. I tapped the wire ever so gently, and out from the open door came the bright eyes and furry head of a Bunny.

It was Mister Rabbit. I perked up my ears, nodded as hard as I could, and in an instant he was out and close beside me, that is, as close as he could be with that separating wire between us.

He understood the game at once when I tried to push that weak square up a little, then gnawed at the edge of the wood beneath it. Mister Rabbit watched me with eager, anxious eyes as I worked without a sound. He would gladly have helped, but he could do nothing to aid me at first, and we both feared lest the slightest creak would find us out.

I kept steadily, noiselessly on, until there was really a promise of making some headway. Nothing disturbed us, but the boarding was thick and hard, the gnawing must be softly done. The wire was stiff as steel always is, and daylight came creeping on before I was nearly through.

My instincts warned me not to tarry too long. So I piled bits of grass, leaves, and small gravel stones up by the place where I had made a little pile of sawdust, shook-a-paws with Mister Rabbit, and took my leave.

But the little man behind the wires knew just as well as I did that I would return the next night if possible, and go at the task again. Of course, it was hard to leave him and the fine beginning, but his eyes looked very different when I left from what they had when I first appeared. They were full of hope, sly, quiet, and watchful.

He went softly back to the wooden house as I glided away. Very happy I felt through the day. Hope is a wonderful thing! It gives courage, perseverance, and cheer. I went forth in the afternoon, gathered wild strawberry leaves, chickweed, an abundance of sweet clover, and dry grass. There should be no lack of food in our refuge, when my mate was so happy as to hop homeward with me in the small hours of another morning.

Midnight came again, and still with a tremble and a care I reached the hutch under the light of twinkling stars. Oh, surely! There was Mister Rabbit at the far corner of the warren, hunched up by the weak wire. He gave as bounding a welcome as he dared, and his round, bright eyes were fairly dancing.

He had been quietly at work on his own ac-

count, and the stubborn wire was indeed pushed up a little farther. Clearing away the brush and pebbles, which I was delighted to see had not been noticed, I worked away with a will, taking great care all the time not to make the least sound.

But, oh, dear! A beautiful Albino that was in that quarter of the hutch must have caught a hint of a grinding, for out she popped, and seeing Mister Rabbit crouching by the wire, and me outside, she was beside us in a twinkling.

If she would only go back! Mister Rabbit tried to lure her by going himself to the little house. No use! Miss Bunny White had scented out our plan, and knew that freedom for my mate was probably near at hand. If there was the least chance for her, too, she meant to make the most of it.

I learned then and there that all the petting and admiration in the world were as nothing compared with living a free, wild life. Yet why had not the snowy beauty escaped sometime when allowed to run over the lawn? She was simply too timid. But now, if there was a fair prospect of starting off with two others of her kind, oh, yes, indeed, Miss Bunny White intended to risk it!

Well, she made herself useful, poor little dear. Seeing the game, she lent her strong teeth in pinch-

ing up that wire, and — snips and witches! but we did it!

Mister Rabbit was gallant enough to push Miss White through the small opening first. She left some of her soft, rich fur sticking to the wires, and although I knew she was hurt, she was brave enough not to make a sign of a whimper.

Crackers! I was scared nearly white myself at the piece of work Mister Rabbit had getting through. Half-way out he got stuck, just clean stuck, and Bunny White and I had to pull with all our might and main, until out he came with a bounce that sent us all three over, our heels sticking up in the air.

The next instant we were all cowering under the deep shadow of the boards. Fortunately, however, a Tabby-cat had sent out a vicious wail somewhere in the distance at the moment when the wire “gave,” which doubtless prevented its being heard.

But, dear sakes! there was so much dark gray fur all about the little opening, that other Bunnies would be sure to see it, and know what it meant. But the keepers would most likely see it first, and attend to it at once.

Just for a moment we kept perfectly still.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE RUNAWAYS

AS it grew perfectly quiet, off we started, hopping along by the edges of the walks, where the shadows were deepest, and then one by one we crossed the road.

In the woods we breathed more freely. I took the lead, feeling quite proud of the comfortable home I could show as the result of my own skill and industry. And very grateful we all three were when the rock loomed before us, and our refuge was safely reached.

Before Mister Rabbit would go in, however, he ran quite a distance farther on, then scratched about in different directions, acting very queerly. What was he about? It was some little time before he finally came back in his own tracks, and entered the refuge.

I could see how pleased he was at the well-made tunnel, but he gave me to understand that we must have crooked turnings and several openings known only to ourselves, giving us a chance

to enter the convenient dwelling in a number of places. These would be of great use in time of danger, or in case an accident happened to one of our rooms.

Poor, pretty little Bunny White had toppled over and sprawled herself out as if too much overcome by excitement to hold out another moment when she entered one of the cosy chambers. It was carpeted with brush and weeds, and was indeed a nice resting-place.

But her eyes wore a look of great contentment, and she tapped softly with a pink-lined fore paw to show how glad, oh, how very glad, she was, to find herself in the wide, free woods, where she could run and wander at her own sweet will.

But I trembled for her, fearing that a glimpse of her beautiful little person would make a hunter, be it either Boy or Man, wild to capture her.

Mister Rabbit let us know that for a little while we must keep as close to our refuge as possible. Our former keeper would be sure to scour the woods in hopes to search us out, and if he got an idea of where we were, there would be no rest for the sole of our foot, until we should find another place in which to hide.

He was right. Wasn't I glad we had a pretty good store of food inside our new warren! We heard footsteps going to and fro a good portion of the next morning. I also heard Hero barking

around the rock, yet he seemed inclined to run beyond it.

Ah, now I knew why Mister Rabbit had run on past our home in the night. He was making mixed-up, perplexing tracks, because he feared that Hero might come assisting the men in finding us, by keeping the scent of our poor little toes. His instincts told him what to do.

So Hero went scrambling on past the rock, although he would keep running back to it, until, getting confused by the many tracks, just as Mister Rabbit meant he should, he would go barking off again. Our entrance was completely hidden by a mass of tangled boughs we had drawn over it.

There were certainly two men with Hero, we knew by the tramping, and could also hear voices, and we were in terror every moment lest they should drag away our screen of sticks and boughs, yet we were glad to notice that the men did not seem to think we were very near the rock, and kept whistling Hero off, as if wishing him to follow up the tracks beyond.

At last they passed on out of hearing, but we did not venture out the livelong day, and when night came, Mister Rabbit let us understand in Rabbit language that he thought they would come again at night. And we were very willing to make what food we had on hand answer until

another day. Anything but being found and captured after all our pains and caution!

Yes, my mate was right again. Long after dark we heard Hero's short, sharp bark, his "hunting bark," I called it, and little twigs snapped and crackled under the feet of the men as they went by. But I was rejoiced at having them pass the rock without stopping, as though they had given up all thoughts of our being anywhere near it.

The next morning, Mister Rabbit decided to steal out and find us food, for our supply was quite gone. I confess to feeling nervous on seeing him go, but he took several short trips and brought clover and weeds enough to last until the next day, when we could go and find fodder for ourselves. He would go with us the first time, and point out places where we could hide quickly, should any danger threaten.

Then a jolly, merry week went by, when six pairs of paws did wonderful work underground. We became very fond of little Miss White, for the pretty dear was like a streak of sunshine in our home, and always so willing to help in her gentle, delicate way.

One day I asked myself some questions: "Who made the rocks that were to be a refuge for the Conies, and for the Rabbits as well? Who taught birds to build nests, spiders to spin a wonderful

web, and Rabbits to burrow out neat, comfortable warrens?"

Dear me, I couldn't tell at all! I did not know. Perhaps I did not need to know. But one thing I felt sure of. That "Maker" did not mean that we should be chased, captured, or made to suffer. Yet we have many foes, and strange little tempers of our own that often make trouble for us. No, I cannot understand it, and there is no use in trying.

Now I must tell what happened one night, although it hurts me even now to speak of it. But first let me say, I was continually in fear on Bunny White's account. I have hinted as much before. Mister Rabbit laughed at me, saying I need not feel so anxious, no harm had come to her yet, and he did not see why any need come.

But you see, Boy, I had been a mother, and was one, and so had the mother instinct that made me tremble for fear of what might happen to so young and beautiful a creature. And pray don't forget, Boy, that love you who may, no one else will ever love you in the same way as your mother does.

Oh, indeed not! Even if you were naughty, dreadfully naughty, so that no one else would stand by you, there would stand the dear, forgiving mother, always full of love and pity for her own dear boy. Better far to be good, and make her proud and happy.

One soft night, when the moon was so bright that we thought of eagles, owls, and bats, we had agreed to all three start out, going but a little way in quest of food for the next day.

Mister Rabbit went first. Then Bunny White skipped joyfully forth, while I stopped to lock up a bit, or, in other words, to partly cover our door.

I was just turning to follow the others, when I heard a sharp little scream. Thinking I knew the sound, I rushed along, but all that could be seen for a moment was a flashing of white and gray forms, leaves being kicked up, and a whirl and a dance such as I should not care to see again.

I knew it all meant dire peril for little Miss Bunny White. She had met a Hare, and the fierce creature that always fights us when he can was determined to bear her off to his burrow, where he would keep her as a beautiful slave.

But if the small, fair Missy was kind and gentle as could be when surrounded by friends, and treated like the little dear she was, she also could and did show fight, plucky fight, when the time came for her to defend herself.

As soon as I fairly took in what was up, with one swift look around to see that air and ground were free from other enemies, up I pranced just as Bunny White dropped to the earth.

Well, we had it tooth and nail, that fighting

Hare and I. The fur flew as fast as it is said to when Mistress Tabby-cat and her enemy, Lord Puss, meet in the stilly night, and each claims the right of way.

That means that as neither will turn out an inch in the road for the other, there is nothing for it but to fly in each other's faces, and the night is apt not to be quite as "stilly" after that.

I think *Fighty Hare* and I must have plucked at each other for several minutes, when there was a crisp rustle in the grass. *Fighty Hare* gave a shrill squeal and bounded away. A snake had nearly squeezed his tail off. It went wriggling off in one direction as the fighting Hare nearly ran his legs off in another. I heard him still squealing as he ran.

Then I turned to the white creature lying still as a moonbeam, and like a little patch of snow in the soft moonlight.

CHAPTER V.

A WOUNDED BEAUTY

BUNNY WHITE was alive. I cannot tell, Boy, how thankful I was at that moment to see my mate come bounding up. There was no need to tell him anything.

He took Bunny White's short ears in his mouth, while I, in a way known to Rabbits, held her paws, and very soon she was lying on a bed of leaves in our blessed refuge, and Mister Rabbit hopped away to fetch the doctor.

We know Doctor Bunny, the moment our eye lights on him. If only he wore spectacles, I feel sure you would say his picture was complete, and almost any creature alive would know him for a funny little medicine-man.

He is a light mottled gray, larger than most of his brother Rabbits, with tall, importantly cocked ears, and a knowing face. The very way he blinks seems to say:

“Here I come! And all the wisdom of all

the Bunny-pills is wrapped up in my plump, gray body."

Yet glad enough I was to see him in our burrow, and very anxiously I watched as he went about finding out whether little Miss White could live. After a time I wanted to poke him, and cry:

"Pray open your mouth, Doctor Bunny, and not keep me waiting so long for what I am on pins and needles to know!"

But you couldn't hurry his Importance. Oh, no, not in the least! He peeped and he peered, lifted a fore paw, then a hind paw, tapped the pretty breast, and pressed against the snowy haunches.

The white creature winced once or twice, but made no sound. Then at last Doctor Bunny let me know that he did not think the white Bunny would ever go outside of the burrow again.

I dropped a Rabbit tear, in fact, several of them, for this little creature had grown very dear to me; and as for Mister Rabbit, he went over into a corner, did himself up into a ball of forlorn-looking fur, and murmured something about being "so young and fair to die."

But the slow old doctor made us understand that he did not say "die," but that Bunny White would probably never be able to go out of the burrow again.



“BUT YOU COULDN'T HURRY HIS IMPORTANCE, OH, NO,
NOT IN THE LEAST”

Then he stamped on leaves, got them together, and rolled the white creature all up in a wad of them. He put little twigs under her paws to keep them in place, and a cushion of dry mosses under her head. He showed us that she must be fed slowly and carefully, and not be moved in the least.

If the doctor was slow and provoking, and a queer old fellow to look at, he was also sure and faithful, two great things in a medicine-man.

Twice again before morning he came to our warren. Once with some strange little leaf pads, which he put all about Bunny White's face, I think for her to smell of. Then again with a bunch of sticky-looking leaves he had to pull apart.

He put pats of the moist leaves here and there under a hurt joint or about a wound. Next he put some dried herbs by themselves, which were to be all the kind of food she was to have until he came again.

For two days I never once saw Bunny White's pink eyes. And yet I do not think she suffered, unless she tried to move. But she seldom stirred. I think, Boy, that Doctor Bunny put those pads about her face to keep her stupid. For whenever I fed her, — and I was glad to see she seemed to like the herbs, — I would catch a smell that with all my knowledge of greens and grasses I had never smelled before.

And every time after being near them I would feel drowsy. Strange, isn't it, that a Bunny-man should find out how to ease and put to sleep his little fellows.

Well, time went on, and little by little the wounded beauty came back to health and some strength. But she could not hop for a long, long time, and when she began to, it was so slowly, that she would merely hump and hitch about, and then we understood why the knowing old doctor had said she probably would never go out of the burrow again.

Yet she does go out quite often, although never to venture more than a few steps beyond one of the entrances of the warren. But in pleasant weather she greatly enjoys browsing around in the fresh, cool, woodland shade, or the soft sunshine.

Whenever she ventures out, however, either Mister Rabbit or Mother Bunny hover near. For in case of accident or sudden alarm, she could neither defend herself nor move quickly away. And we are only very glad to watch over and protect her.

Unhappy? Indeed not! She is one of the very most contented, cheerful creatures you ever saw. And I do believe she thinks her injuries were after all a blessing. She would always have been in great danger of having her liberty taken from her. And she would far, far rather be lame and

partly helpless, with sweet freedom in our comfortable yet wild burrow, than to be kept as a pampered pet in the finest private hutch in the world.

Then, had she gone much abroad, her snowy coat would always have been quickly seen, and other animals besides Hares might have been jealous of her, and done her harm. But in the refuge under the rock, and well beyond it, she dwells in safety, is sheltered and fed in cold and stormy weather, and whenever she chooses, has cheery peeps out-of-doors.

Then, too, we have a great deal of company. Our children come often to see us, and as we have now occupied our warren for years, other Rabbit friends come frequently for neighborly calls, often bringing some nice titbit for the lame Bunny they know all about.

She is so useful, too. No matter how long Mister Rabbit or Mother Bunny may have to be away, she is always in the home to welcome us on our return.

We have been through a great deal since this took place. Many families of baby-Bunnies have come to us, and we have extended our burrow until it is as spacious a home for a Bunny-warren as could be desired.

Only our last brood of Bunnies is with us. As new troops of children came, the older ones disappeared. There is many a snug burrow in

these woods filled with my children and grandchildren. But I like the old home best of all.

Ah, that sly look again! No, no, Boy, safe as it might be for you alone to know the place of our refuge, yet if you sometime should catch a peep at Miss Bunny White, it might come about that others would see her also.

And you know that Great Book said we were but a "feeble folk," which shows we would not be able to make defence against objects much stronger than ourselves.

And then again, Rabbits born in captivity like Mister Rabbit and Mother Bunny can never make as strong a fight as a wild Rabbit would. So, seeing we have kept our house a secret place for several years, my instincts tell me it will be decidedly best to continue keeping it safely hidden.

As to rocks, the woods here are full of them. One is but little different from another, so rest content, while health is coming back to your sturdy young frame, with hearing Mother Bunny's story from her own lips. It is more than most Boys ever get a chance to do.

Truth to tell, I never heard of any other Boy in the world that a Rabbit talked to, so that he could understand.

CHAPTER VI.

A DROLL FAMILY

NOW I am glad, Boy, we meet again, for a funny thing has happened since you were last perched on the comfortable stump.

Let me see, it was last week that I saw you, and the next day after you were here it began raining, and kept on for two days and nights. And we furry creatures of the Bunny family are noted for being scarce enough as soon as rain begins to fall.

Well, it was five nights ago, after rain had been falling until after midnight, that Mister Rabbit kept running up to one of our walls and listening, and Bunny White declared she heard cries that sounded like calls of distress.

You see, it is very likely that in burrowing through the earth, any animal might dig so near some other burrow, that sounds could come through at some very thin place in the wall of earth.

We had been scooping out a new passage in a winding direction that would bring us out near

a place in the woods where was an abundance of acorns, and certain weeds of which we are very fond.

The summer is running away, and all the underground families will soon begin laying in cold-weather stores. So, although our house is already pretty roomy, we take pleasure in adding to its convenience now and then, also taking care not to work our way through to some other abode.

More than once we have pushed through to an opening that we knew meant some one else's front or back door. Then we would at once have to go to work and throw up solid earthworks between the passages.

Now when both Mister Rabbit and Bunny White thought that some animals were in trouble not far away from us, we all three ran to an end of the new tunnel, and sure enough, there came a sound of "weeps," as we call it, dimly heard on the other side.

We could not go outside in the rain to find out what was the matter, and so the quickest way was going to be to push the earth away at the thin spot, just a little to begin with, take a peep into the next room, and offer help if it was needed.

Needed indeed! It took but a pick or two to break through into another burrow, and, cock-a-roo! what a fix!

We found ourselves in a wonderful set of rooms.

Really, I had never seen such workmanship. There must have been a separate room for each member of the family, for each little section was fitted up for the use of one small creature.

But this is what had happened: We had come upon a family of moles. And I think they must have been in their dining-room, having a midnight lunch, when down came the roof, nearly smothering them.

In other words, the earth had caved, and as a heap of small stones must have been directly over the burrow, they could not dig themselves out, so the poor little things were just buried in their own house.

It is seldom such a thing as this happens. Instinct, the wonderful gift that leads and teaches dumb creatures, somehow shows at what depth a tunnel in the ground should be made. But everybody and everything makes a mistake sometimes, and the moles had made their dining-room in too shallow an opening. Perhaps the heap of stones deceived them.

Now moles and Rabbits are not particularly friendly. But have you never read, Boy, that distress and need of help will make even enemies kind to each other?

Why, right here let me tell you a story I once heard my keeper tell, about what a mouse did for a fox.

You know Reynard — another name for Mister Fox — would snap up a mouse quicker than a wink, if he chanced to see one scudding through the field. But this poor Reynard, with all his “foxy” slyness, got caught in a trap, and do his best he could not get out.

But there was one place where the wire spring was tied by a stout cord to a tree, but way outside the trap, where Reynard could not possibly reach it.

Well, along came Mousey, and saw in a twink the fix Mister Reynard was in. And his lordship, in that dangerous pass, was not too proud to make a bleat and a whine, begging Miss Mousey to help him.

So, being a good-natured little thing, Mousey set to work with her sharp teeth, and lo! in a little while she had let down the spring, and out leaped Reynard, the happiest fox alive! Then he turned about and actually made a bow to Miss Mousey, which was his way of giving thanks.

And now, when we saw a family of moles flattened out under such a weight of earth, sticks, and stones that they could not even get at their mouths or claws to gnaw or to scratch, to work we went, Mister Rabbit, Bunny White, and Mother Bunny, and began trying to set them free. The children were all in a far part of the burrow, and so could not help us.

We soon saw that two of us, Mister Rabbit and I, would have to go out in all the dampness before much could be done. But it is very selfish to stop to think of harm to ourselves when another creature is in great danger.

Out we went, and my! how hard we worked poking away at the heavy mass that was pinning the poor moles down. After a time, back we went inside, and what do you think? All we could do was to pull the moles out backward by their little stumpy tails.

Have you ever seen moles? And do you know how they look? Their fine gray fur, almost black, is like velvet so beautifully thick and downy. They have no necks to speak of, and their short, stumpy legs and feet are bare, just as bare as your arm.

The tail is so short it was hard to grab it. You could not find any ears if you were to search for them a long time, nor would you be likely to find any eyes. Most people believe a mole is blind, but this is not so, although their tiny eyes are not much larger than a fig or cranberry seed. But they surely can tell light from darkness, and can hear and smell keenly.

They have sharp teeth, and can bite right smartly, and their appetite is something tremendous. In fact, if they had to go without food even for a little while, they would not live. They eat things that crawl, moist foods, baby mice, and

birds, when they can get them, and, unlike us, they drink a great deal of water.

Again unlike us, they do not cover up the doors of their homes with brush or twigs, but throw up a little hillock of earth, which we should not consider a wise thing to do. For it is plainly seen, and owls or bats, or perhaps Mistress Puss, might watch, hoping to see a mole come out. Then, scree-e-e!

Still, the older moles are very quick to scent out danger, and keep a sharp watch over the little ones, and all the underground creatures take care of themselves and their young in a way that is surprising.

Well, we toiled away, and although it was slow work, yet we pulled fourteen moles out from the hard pile that was over them. Some were little bits of things, and how you would have laughed could you have seen the way a few of the totties came out!

We would draw out a big mole by the tail, and it would be holding a little one in its teeth by the back where a neck should be. Or, out we would pull another big fellow by the knob of a tail, and in its claws would be another nob of a tail. Once a procession of three came struggling out, two clutching another by the leg.

There is generally a disposition on the part of the smaller animals to help one another when

in trouble. We made a night of it, for after our poor friends were out, we assisted them in making a passage through to the other door of their house. Then we left them.

It took us all of two days to build a good, thick partition between the two burrows. But we like to work, and very snug and tidy we had our house again, long before the moles could get theirs in order.

But yesterday afternoon there came a smart rap at our door. I went and very cautiously peeped out. The scrap of a tail of a mole could be seen through the opening. I at once let him in. What do you think? He had come, inviting us three, Mister Rabbit, Bunny White, and Mother Bunny, to a supper at his burrow last night.

Well, we went, and of all the feasts! First, however, we were shown his house. Why, Boy, we went into room after room, as many as twelve of them, and, just as I had imagined, each mole had a room of its own, except the baby-mites.

Over the rooms was a round gallery, and still a second gallery over the first one. These were full of passages leading into more rooms yet, and also to the openings in the hillocks through which they go out into the woods.

So I found that from outside they could plunge through these hillocks or funny little doors, and be at once in a gallery, or side-room, where it

would be hard for any creature besides a mole to follow them. Really, it is astonishing how much the moles know, and with what skill they build their houses.

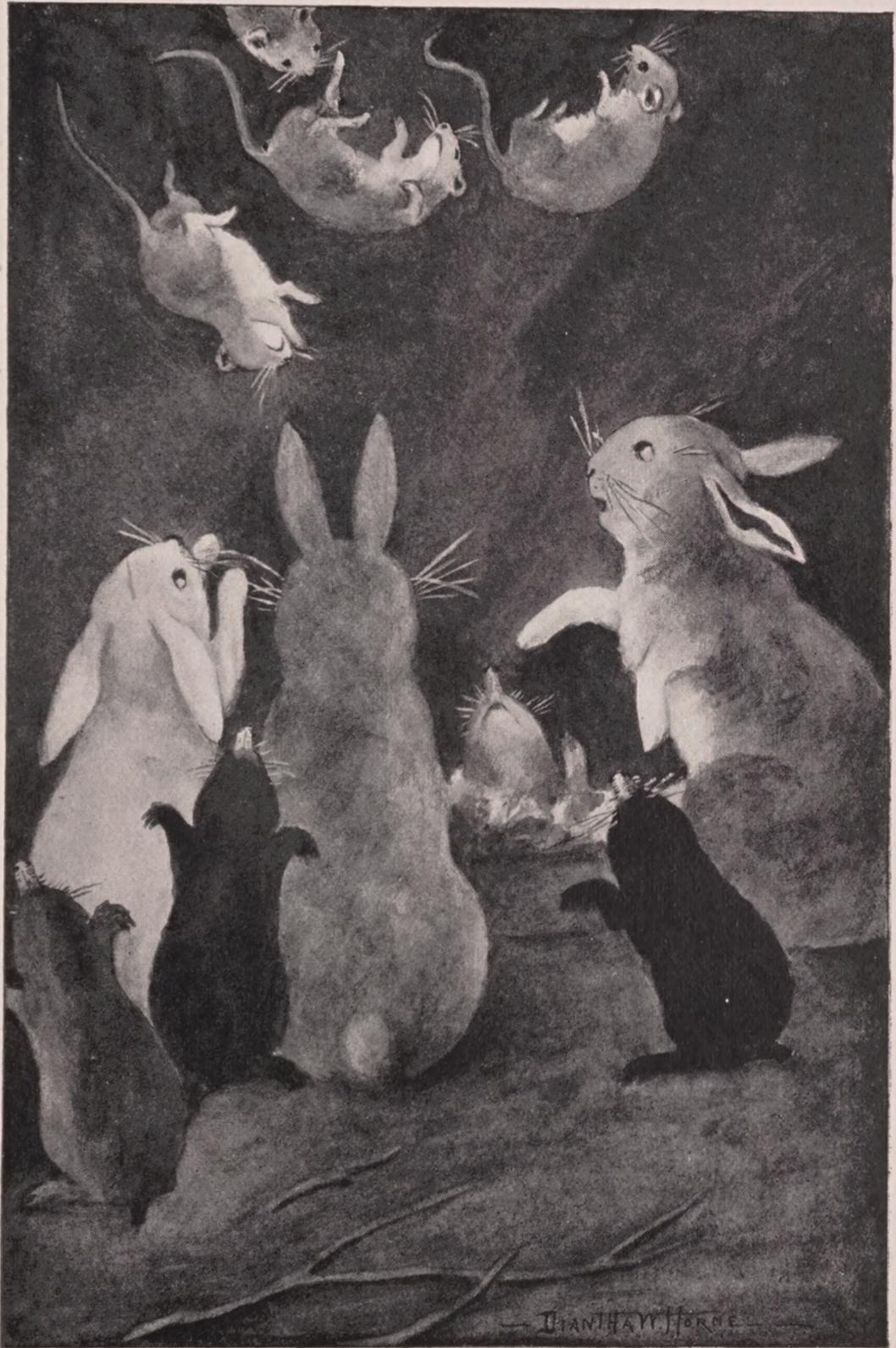
The long dining-room was at the end of a winding passage, and higher up than the rest of the rooms, having no other room or gallery over it. Here we found green nuts, cabbage leaves, celery tops, green grapes, watercresses, and tender bits of fishes called minnows, freshly caught.

For let me tell you that moles are famous swimmers, and can not only find food in the ground, the garden, and field, but can plunge into the mud or the water, and snap up a plump little frog, or catch plenty of small fishes. They seemed surprised that we did not eat either the crisp watercresses or the dainty little fishes, as they did not know that Rabbits eat only drier kinds of food.

But alack and alas! What do you think again? The earth must be very soft, crumbly, and deceitful, in the direction of the home of the moles.

We were nearly through our feasting, when there was a falling, a thumping, a squeaking, squealing, and kicking, such as I had never heard and seen before. And head over heels, or, rather, heels over head, and tails in air, came a whole family of mice, tumbling pell-mell right on to our supper-table!

They had been burrowing in a shallow hole over



“ TUMBLING PELL - MELL RIGHT ON TO OUR SUPPER -
TABLE ”

that unfortunate dining-room, when their floor gave way, and such a funny mix-up of dirt, mice, moles, and Rabbits, you never saw!

Alack again! In less than a minute there was the most dreadful fight! All I could see was dark gray mole-fur, mouse tails, little bare legs, bright eyes, tiny ears, and flying figures.

It may not seem very brave or noble, but Mister Rabbit, Bunny White, and Mother Bunny sneaked off as quickly and as quietly as possible. After all, it was the best thing we could have done. We did not wish to be mixed up in such a battle. The moles may think we ought to have stayed and helped fight the mice. Yet why should we? I am very glad we came peacefully away.

What the moles will do next, I have no idea. What is that loud clang I hear? Ah, your dinner-bell. Well, good-by, Boy, perhaps some day you will "call again."

CHAPTER VII.

A FAR - AWAY PARTY

ANOTHER fortnight and it is getting snappy outside. Of course, there is always something new to tell. But first let me say that the mole family that was near us has moved away.

This was wisdom on their part, as I think they were in a soft spot, and too near other burrows.

I must say I am rather glad they have gone, for I am afraid they are of a hot temper, and it is not best to be on too intimate terms with animals whose natures you are not much acquainted with. They thought we did them a kindness, as we certainly tried to, and they gave us a supper to show their gratitude. Now we go our separate ways in a perfectly friendly spirit.

Day before yesterday one of my grandchildren came over from a far piece of woods, and invited us all, nine in number, to a great family party.

Bunny White thanked him prettily, but said she could not think of hopping such a distance, so should make herself very happy at home. The

rest of us accepted the invitation with jolly thanks.

Now it was going to take a long time for us to reach my grandchild's warren, and a long time to get back home. For, you see, we must go with great caution. Because, for eight Rabbits to go streaking over a long piece of woods is no very safe affair. We must slip along one by one, keeping well apart, and each running to cover every little while.

Always, everywhere when abroad, we must keep in mind that we are "a feeble folk," with but small strength with which to fight other animals, or run away from the swift feet of men-creatures.

We all had our adventures. We started early that same afternoon, expecting to return the next day, which was yesterday.

First, I stopped to pity and help a family so small and forlorn, that is, forlorn in view of what had happened to them, that it is one of the great mysteries in Nature, how or why such ruin could befall them. And it is also a great wonder how such tiny specks of creatures can plan, contrive, build, and manage as they do.

It was a family, or, rather, a colony of ants. Oh, the leastest mites of beings, and so capable!

Dear, dear! A Boy had scraped away the coverings of several of their hillocks, and laid bare their cute little homes, that were already well

filled with winter stores. Never could I have seen the inside of those houses, had not the roofs been scratched away as they were.

And think of it: the Boy did it *just for fun!*

What would you say or what would you do, if some monstrous giant should come along, and, just to amuse himself, should tear away the roof of your house, ruin the furniture, crush your little brothers and sisters, and then run laughing away?

Ah! I see you have no words in which to tell what you would say or what you would do. But I think I know something about how you would feel.

These brave little objects went right about building their houses over again, and — do let me tell you! Way underground, these tiny creatures had as complete homes as one would find anywhere. Why, Boy; I can scarcely describe to you the intelligence shown by the ants.

And this brings back to me, what one of those men-visitors that came to the hutch one day, said was in that Greatest Book in the world, about the ants.

A sluggard is a very lazy person who hates to work, but it is a “person,” for all that, a creature belonging to the very highest order of beings there is. Yet the Great Book said: “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise.” Then in another place, it said:

“The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer.”

Now I think to be mentioned twice, and to be called “a people” in the Greatest Book there ever was, is something to be exceeding proud of. But to have the human people, those most knowing creatures that ever were made, sent to them as examples of smart little workers, I don’t know what to say about such a grand thing.

Then to think of their long line as a family, what men call antiquity! People are proud of belonging to old families, but to come down in a straight line almost from the beginning of the world, my, how distinguished!

Ants are sometimes called “emmetts,” I think, for once a nice, sober-looking man said in my hearing, as he stood gazing down at an ant-hill:

“ ‘These Emmets, how little they are in our eyes,
We tread them to dust and a troop of them dies
Without our regard or concern.
Yet, wise as we are, if we went to their school,
There’s many a sluggard and many a fool
Some lessons of wisdom might learn.’ ”

Lessons, I should say! Why, they had regular little caves, with passage after passage leading to room after room, some of them all of twelve inches or a foot high. Only think of it, does it

seem possible? And the rooms were built with an eye to their special uses.

Some were nurseries, or baby-rooms, some were guest-chambers, others store-rooms, still others, work-rooms, and sitting or family rooms.

And what do you say to thousands and thousands of tiny mites living in one great community, or, we might say, as one great family.

Do they always live peaceably, you ask? It is queer how such things can be found out. Yet they are. It is told that they sometimes have fierce little fights, and, funny as it is, they will "hold spite," or remember a spat a long time. I do not doubt, however, that they are quiet and good-natured most of the time.

They hear and smell more quickly than people can, and their brightness and shrewdness are a never-ending wonder to men. It is said, too, that the brain of an ant is the largest in proportion to its size of any known living creature.

Men who have watched them closely think they have a kind of language in which they make their ideas known to each other. They appear to have regular builders, watchmen, nurses, and teachers among them. And at the entrances to their little homes they appeared to have the watchmen keeping guard to prevent the specks of children from running away.

There were long, evenly scooped tunnels that

led to their hunting-grounds and playgrounds, for after working hours are over they dance and skip, frolic and frisk about, in the liveliest, merriest fashion.

How do you suppose they get from one wide settlement to another? By building bridges, if you please! They visit relatives and friends, often greeting them with great joy. The scraps of mothers or nurses tend the children with great care, and show much fondness for them.

They have black insects that they look after with constant care. Bless you, they are their cows! The ants know just how to tap or press against them, and from tiny tubes in their bodies there comes a sweet juice, honey-like, and answering for milk for the ants.

It does seem as if the tiny bits of creatures we call ants, or emmets, had power to reason things out. Don't ever put your foot, Boy, on the little hillock that leads to one of their fine, perfect cities. It must be a sin to do it wilfully.

Such smart, active atoms deserve help, not destruction. The ants I saw had stored away syrup, grain, and seeds enough, I should think, to last them all winter.

I had to stop and help the poor little things, which I did by getting together loose material, such as hair, threads, clumps of fibre, and feathers.

These I laid up close to their spoiled home, then left them.

I had spent an hour assisting the ants, and after leaving them had not gone far when I saw Mister Rabbit and two of my children peeping out from under a rock, and beckoning wildly. Fast as I could I hurried over to the new refuge.

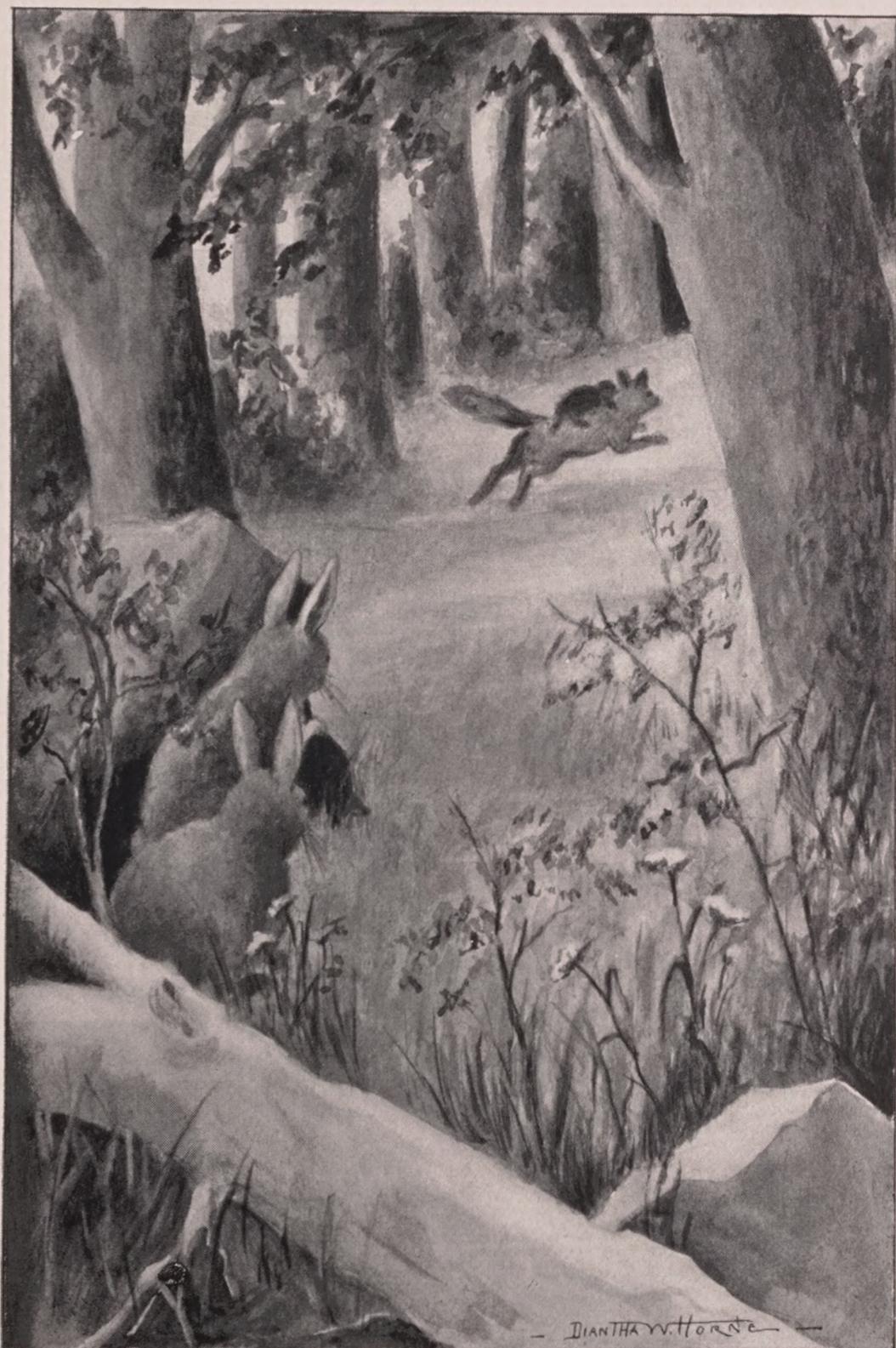
Other animals must have begun a home there, for we had just room enough, the four of us, to creep into the hole beneath an end of the rock. We kept the younger ones in the close shelter, while Mister Rabbit and I peeped slyly around from behind the brush near the opening. Danger was somewhere. I soon knew what.

A woodchuck went slowly dragging by, a scrubby, disagreeable-looking animal, with coarse, bristly hair sticking up all over its body, the red skin showing underneath.

It went with a tagging, cautious movement, and I got the idea that it was dodging, or trying to dodge, some danger. All at once it ran up to a tree, and what do you think it did?

There is a curious animal in the South, the opossum, which the black people call "possum," that when hunted will go into a tree, hang itself up by the tail, head-down, bare feet dangling, shamming dead.

This woodchuck, also named ground-hog, must have seen the possums pretending to be dead.



“ AND OFF HE DARTED AT A BREAKNECK SPEED, THE
WOODCHUCK CLUTCHING HIM ABOUT THE NECK ”

For the clumsy creature humped up to the low-hanging branch of a walnut-tree, and as its tail was scarcely long enough to curl around the limb, it just clasped its hind feet over it, closed its eyes, and pretended to be dead.

In a moment, along came a young man, who laughed aloud as he saw the woodchuck's game. He lifted a gun, and was just going to fire, when — scoot, went a fox just a bit down the foot-path.

The young hunter thought he had rather shoot the fox than the woodchuck. Reynard had seen him, however, and kept a sharp eye out as the young man hid behind some bushes, the better to take aim.

And what was more, that crafty woodchuck had peeped open an eye and saw the fox preparing to make a run. My mate and I shook with laughter at what happened next.

As Reynard slid under the walnut-tree, down dropped Mister Woodchuck right on to his back. The fox thought he was shot, and off he darted at a breakneck speed, the woodchuck clutching him about the neck.

The hunter fired, but missed his aim, for up a tiny hill, then down into a valley, we could see in the distance Reynard and his passenger scudding for their lives. I thought I knew what that crafty woodchuck would do. Keep his seat on

Reynard's back, until he rushed into some deep hollow, when down his Chuckship would slide, and scratch out of sight before the fox had missed him.

Reynard is sly, but a woodchuck is a match for him. Nearly all swift-running animals are sly. I suppose they have need to be.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE ABOUT THE PARTY

ALL this had detained us again, but now Mister Rabbit sailed out afresh, going about half a rood, or twenty yards, then as he ran to a slight cover, I started off the children one at a time, and soon followed them.

Dear me! Were we never to reach that party ground? As I drew near an elm-tree, I heard my mate tapping with his hind paws, always a sign of impatience or warning, and there were all the children in hiding, this time in a large hollow in the trunk of the tree. In a trice Mister Rabbit and I were also in the friendly hollow.

Ah, they had seen the fox again. The hunter had headed him off, and he was harking back the way he had gone, leading his pursuer a great chase, but just then, oh, such a strange thing as came about! I cannot think of it now, without a shudder.

Up rushed that fox, and quicker than a flash darted into a wide hole just under where we were

hiding. Imagine it! Eight Bunnies in the same tree with a fox!

Indeed, I can assure you, wild creatures need to have all their wits about them.

Now I see a question in your eyes, Boy. You are wondering if, after all, a gentle little animal like Mother Bunny would not be better off and enjoy life more, in a sheltered warren, watched over and cared for by a keeper, than to run the risks of a wild, forest life.

No! a thousand times, no! I have settled that question long ago. And then — as to having a keeper, and being watched over? Boy, we have a Keeper, and we are watched over. I feel just as sure of it as if some spirit of the air had whispered it in my high-cocked ear. It must be so. And it makes even a Mother Bunny feel safe.

There was now only one thing for us to do. And there was only one thing for Reynard to do. The fox must simply wait for the hunter to go away, then we must simply wait for the fox to go away.

Yet so swift had been the movements of the fox, that the man with the gun looked about in perplexity when he suddenly disappeared.

Do you know anything about the patience of a hunter? Another hour went by while that man waited, poking about and peering around, yet not going any distance from the spot where he last

saw that bushy tail. And, oh, goodness! He actually tapped the tree with his gun where we were all in hiding.

But he did not look as high as to the opening where my poor family were squeezed together, and sticks and brush must have fallen across the mouth of the hole where Reynard had crept in.

Then came events that scared me nearly out of my acute little senses. The hunter had turned his back and was moving off, when a pretty gray squirrel ran across the place where the fox lay concealed. Now wouldn't you suppose that his foxship would have been too thankful at a prospect of escape with his own life just then, to have made a dash at a poor little squirrel?

But no, out he sprang, and already had a paw on the squirrel's furry back, when the hunter looked around. In less time than I can tell it, Mister Fox had let go his game, and scrambled back into the protecting hole, and the squirrel was way up over our heads, chattering his joy and thanks at his deliverance.

Ah, but Reynard the fox had made a grievous mistake! In that instant when his greedy paw closed over the squirrel's back, the hunter saw him. Alack! and he also saw the quick plunge Reynard made into some hollow at the foot of the tree.

In an instant man and gun were at the old elm,

and the butt of a gun was thrust into the hole there had been no chance to cover. That did no good.

Then the man, with a sharp jack-knife, cut down a long branch from the tree and pushed it into the hollow, exclaiming as he did so, "Aha, Mister Fox, I've got you now!"

But the long, prodding branch did no good. The man stopped and thought. I could see he was trying to plan what to do next. I trembled all over, for it was plain to see that the hunter did not mean to go away again until he had made Reynard come out of hiding.

Would he dig behind the hollow, and so drive him out? No, he had neither pick nor shovel, and no man could dig with his hands as we could with our paws. What he would plan in his sharp mind was a mystery.

All at once I saw him gather up bits of light twigs, chips, and dry leaves. With his jack-knife he stripped up bark, and split a branch or two into fine pieces of wood. Next, from his pocket he took a newspaper. All these, twigs, bark, chips, and paper, he put before the mouth of the hole. Then out from another pocket came a card of matches.

Mercy on us! He was going to make a fire before Reynard's door and *smoke him out!*

Would it not also choke us to death? Mister

Rabbit sank back into the hollow, cowering down with the children. You may laugh if you want to at my curiosity, but midst all the danger I was fascinated, and bound to see the matter out as far as I could. I did not see any too much.

Boo, loo! In a few moments more I thought my eyes would be put out. Up came a cloud of smoke that nearly blinded me, yet I did see the fox come with a mighty spring out of the hole and dart like a flash into a thicket of bushes. There was the sharp report of a gun as I, too, flopped way into the hollow, scaring Mister Rabbit almost to death, for he seemed to think that I was shot.

Oh, dear, no. I was all right, only so nearly suffocated with smoke that I had to make a kind of bark, my throat and eyes were so full of it. There really was less of it inside the hollow.

Was the tree on fire? The children cried out that it must be, but Mother Bunny said she did not think a tree would take fire as easily as all that. And after what seemed a long time, there was less smoke, and soon as I dared I peeped forth.

Yes, the smoke was going down. No sign of hunter or fox was abroad. Whether Reynard was killed, or whether his fleet limbs bore him away in safety, I do not know. One thing was almost certain: he would not come prowling around that elm-tree again in a hurry.

Surely you would have laughed had you seen the sorry-looking troop of Bunnies that came limping out of the tree-hollow. We were all so cramped that at first we could scarcely stand. And the whole crowd blinked as though their eyes refused to stay open. Some of the children declared their legs were broken, but when Mother Bunny said, "Oh, well, then we shall have to limp back home and give up going to the party," they decided that the brisk little limbs were not *quite* broken, and we might as well go on.

So off started Mister Rabbit, then the children, Mother Bunny, as usual, going last of all. Everything that a Mother Bunny sees teaches her something, and I had learned something on that trip which was to help me bravely before long. It had to do with that card of matches the hunter had used. I picked up what he had left, and hid them safely on a limb of the tree, to find and take with me on the return trip.

It was growing dusky in the woods as we again streaked along, going steadily on this time. All had reached the party-warren but myself, when twiddling along the forest-path I saw an enormous Hare.

I was not in a mood for fighting, and tripped nimbly to cover under a tangle close by, watching the high-tempered fellow as he ambled along, stopping every half-minute to rear up on his hind

legs, cock up his ears, and listen to any sounds that might excite him. I was to hear from that same fellow later. Very glad I was to have seen him first, however, as I much preferred to attend the party with all my fur on.

At length I was there. They say, Boy, that after a sailor has had a long, hard voyage across the sea, he forgets all the storms and perils as soon as he strikes land, and finds himself in a snug, safe harbor.

And just so I forgot woodchucks, foxes, hunters, and smoke, guns and Hares, on finding myself in the fine, winding, extensive burrow of my grandchildren. Such a fine place as we had reached, and only think, I had great-grandchildren in that burrow!

Young mothers nowadays, even in the animal kingdom, keep making improvements on what their parents and grandparents had, and the baby-rooms in this burrow were fitted up beyond anything I had ever seen in Bunny nurseries. The mothers had carried feathers of birds into them, making regular little feather-beds, mixed with Bunny-fur. They are now thought to be more healthful than all made of fur.

And may I be preserved from shaking to death with laughter, but dear sakes! the doctor Bunnies do not think that either fur or feather pillows are good for furry babies, they prefer hair. So

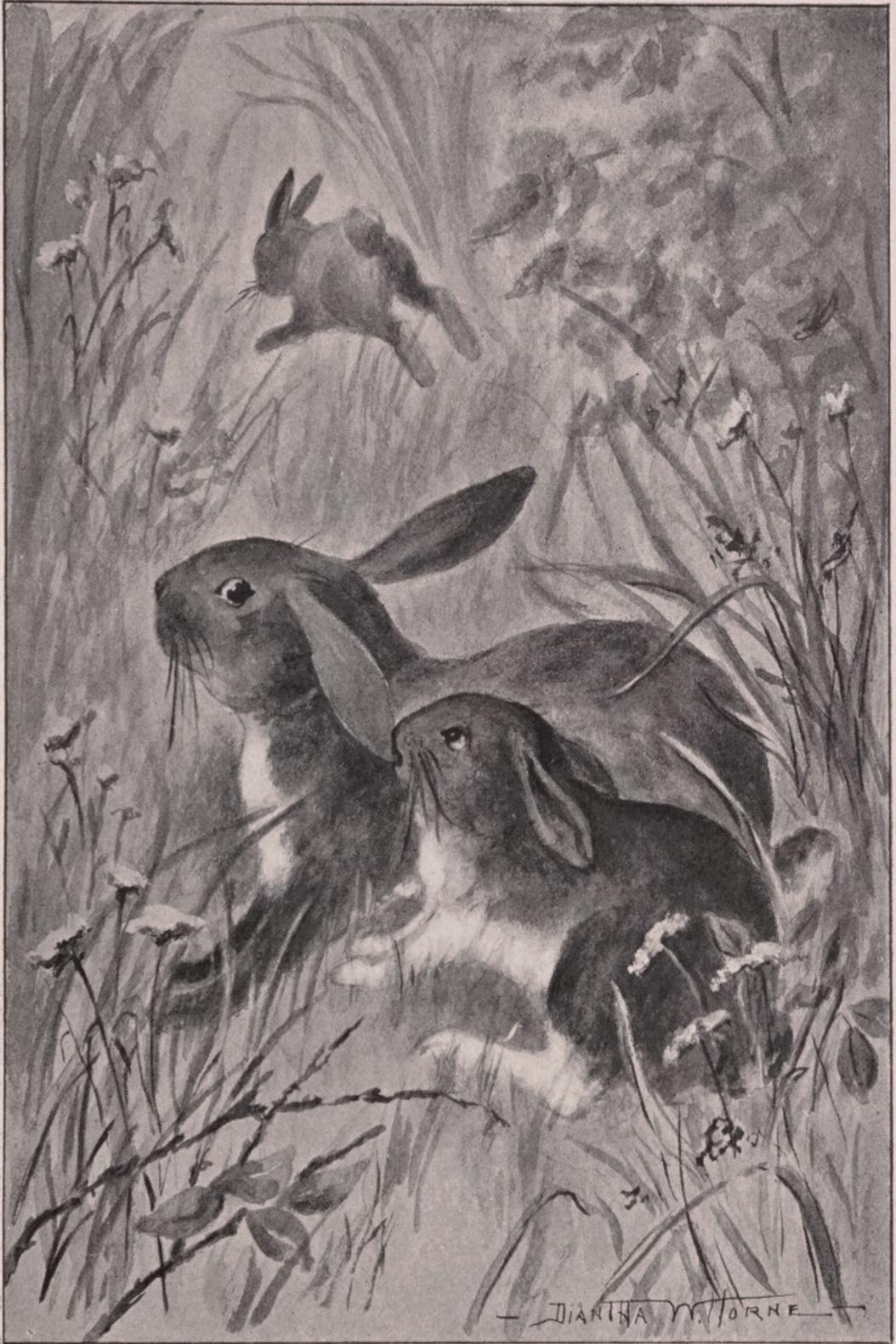
hair pillows were hunched up under the heads of the tiny mites. Now did you ever!

We had to go all through the burrow, visiting brood-chambers, sleeping-rooms, store-rooms, eating-rooms, living-rooms, kitchen, halls, entry-ways, archways, and porches. Every little while we would feel fresh air about us, and this we found was because of the many covered entrances, far more than we have in our burrow.

I cannot begin to tell of the good things we had to eat. Leaves and herbs, dried berries, sweet weeds, tender roots, vegetable tops, nuts, and fine sweet corn. Some of the older, stronger Bunnies had to go for the corn. But sometimes the farmer leaves a lot cut down, but not taken from the husk, and corn, husk, and silky tassel, when a little dry, are all very sweet to our taste.

We went out and danced by moonlight, some of the older Bunnies watching in turn that no danger appeared. Nothing alarmed us, and we tripped on pink and merry toes to the music of a rustling breeze until the moon hid her head and daylight was not far off.

Oh, how shocking for old Bunnies! Yet it did us good, and after the merry revel we tumbled into soft beds, and slept until noontime. Then after feasting on the plenty still left for us, we started for home. The party had been a great success.



“I RACED UP, GRABBED HIM BY THE EAR, AND GAVE
IT A TWEAK THAT MADE HIM DROP MY CHILD”

Do you suppose that in setting forth on the home trip we thought of the perils of the day before, and dreaded it? Not a bit of it! We thought it fun! Just as long as woodsy creatures suffer no harm, they like to dart, scramble, hide, kick, and scratch about. We have bright eyes, acute ears, so can see, hear, and also smell, danger. Our feet are brisk, even if we cannot make the speed of many four-legged creatures.

So we are only too glad to do our own digging and building, and go on independent little journeys whenever and wherever we like; can't you see what sport it is?

We travelled homewards as we went, one by one. Mister Rabbit took the lead, the children came next, Mother Bunny brought up the rear. Only the too-hooting of a couple of owls sent us all in hiding once. Mister Rabbit had reached home, so had the children, all but one, when I heard a rush and squeak.

Then I saw a sight that set my blood on fire. The same old Hare I had seen popping and rearing the day before had in his clutch one of my children. "So ho!" I thought, "that is your game, is it? Going to make a servant of one of my choice young Bunnies! I reckon not, Mister Hare!"

I raced up, grabbed him by the ear, and gave it a tweak that made him drop my child quite as

quickly as he had picked it up. Bunny ran home, while the Hare-rogue and I had it hot and scratchy. I was getting exhausted when Mister Rabbit arrived on the battle-ground. The young Bunny had told him about the trouble.

Two against one is pretty hard for the one, but the Hare fought us both until I don't believe he could see out of his eyes, then he toppled over. His rich chinchilla fur was flying about, for in truth he was a handsome fellow, but he looked pretty well plucked as he lay there, heels drawn up and his eyes closed.

We left him to "come to" as best he could; no danger the rebel would die. I stopped only long enough to get the matches I had put aside the day before, then wobbled home with Mister Rabbit, both of us a bit lame in the joints. Bunny White had a fine supper waiting for us, and after the fun and frolic, the travelling and the adventures, it seemed perfectly beautiful to be in our own comfortable home again.

CHAPTER IX.

MY MATCHES AND A TRAP

GETTING plump and rugged, aren't you, Boy? That is fine, because I know from certain signs that your parents are getting ready to take you back to your city home and your school, where you will study through the long, bright winter, fitting yourself to be a man sometime.

Don't smile, will you, if I give just one piece of advice? But we small creatures of "the lower animal kingdom," yes, that is what they say we belong to, "the lower animal kingdom," do everything that we do at all in the very best way we can. And if I were a Boy, I would go for the very best things in the way of learning and filling a good place in the world that I possibly could. That is all. A short sermon, but then, from only a Mother Bunny, you know, what could be expected?

Now, were you to hear a dozen or a hundred stories from the little fellows or the little mothers

that live in the woods, they would be one long string of adventures, tight places, and escapes, because a wild life, sweet and welcome as it is, has to be full of these things, be it lived in some wild jungle, deep forest, swampy everglade, or a fine large tract of woods such as my dear home is in.

A few days ago one of my children raced into the warren with eyes stretched wide, and trembling both from the speed it had been put to, and fright at the object it had seen.

“O Mother Bunny! Mother Bunny!” it bleated, “such a dreadful creature as is trying to get into our burrow, it will kill us all, I know it will!”

I tried to get an explanation that would give me an idea as to what the creature was like. The young Rabbit said it slipped along much like a snake. Its body was long, legs short, it ran out considerable of a neck, and its face was like a mouse’s.

Then Bunny White remembered that the day before, while taking a peep from one of our doors, she had seen a reddish back, a white breast, and a body that was all white underneath. She, too, had noticed that the animal wriggled along on a pair of short legs with a movement much like a snake’s.

I thought I could name it. It must have been

a weasel. Fierce creatures they are, and famous hunters because of the many things that they can do. A weasel will glide along the ground in a swift, stealthy way, springing on a mouse, chicken, or mole, killing it in an instant with its sharp teeth. Or it will go twisting up a tree, making a wicked visit to a bird's nest, and doing great mischief.

Or again, down it will slip to the water's edge, snap up a frog or baby duck, and should it take a notion, into the water it will dive, and pick at a fish in almost no time. In the hayloft it will suck out eggs by the nestful.

Then it can make leaps and springs such as few animals are able to do in mid-air. It will bound across a space from one limb to another of a large tree, or, if it sees a plump bird on a branch, up it will dart from the ground, landing near enough to poor Birdie to frighten him dreadfully. Yet with all its agility, the weasel cannot fly, so Birdie has one advantage that he usually makes the most of.

No enemy in our forest home is more dreaded than the weasel. He is tough and strong, but, fortunately for us, carries about a rank, unpleasant odor, that lets us know when he is near.

We huddled together, not knowing just where Mister Weasel might show his extremely unwelcome nose. But I soon found he was picking his

way through at one end of our living-room. Then the question became, what to do?

Ah, but Mother Bunny had recently learned a lesson which was to serve her now. If an animal once gets thoroughly scared in a particular place, he does not soon forget it, and will not be at all likely to visit the place again in a hurry. I meant to give the weasel such a scare as would not go out of his mind for one long while.

Very quietly yet swiftly I set to work, and Mister Rabbit helped me. We did as that hunter had done: piled a mass of rubbish before the place where Mister Weasel was scratching through.

I think Mother Bunny was pretty brave in what she did next. For out she crept on tiptoe, and, without making a sound, pushed a lot of brush and even stones before the opening where the weasel had gone in. And so silently and gradually was it done, that the foul creature at work inside did not notice when the light at his back slowly faded away.

Then back I hurried, and fixed pieces of paper in and about the brush inside. After that, there was nothing to do but watch sharply until a dirty paw should come through the wall of earth. Pretty soon it came. My matches were ready. Mister Rabbit set fire to an end of the brush while I crammed it through the hole.

Such a whisking and a scrambling as there was!

With little sticks we kept forcing the smouldering rubbish through the opening, which we were careful not to get large enough for the weasel to come through. The smoke must have confused him, when he found himself hemmed in by the brush I had tangled outside.

We heard sharp squeals, a tearing and romping and barking as we listened all a-tremble. At length, there was a series of mad, wild bounces, then all was still. Mister Weasel had torn his way out.

The smoke in our burrow was so thick by this time, that we were glad to creep outside and air ourselves, and also to open a couple of our entrances nearest where the little flame had been. There was no trace of any living creature but ourselves to be seen. Animals dislike smoke, and are afraid of fire. And we were all amused and relieved to hear an animal coughing and choking in the distance, as if it were nearly strangled. The sound grew fainter and fainter, as the creature ran farther and farther away.

I must confess our dwelling had a smoky odor for a few days, but that was nothing compared with having a fierce, cruel creature burst into our midst, that might have killed us all, for, with his sharp teeth and serpent-like movements, the weasel is a deadly foe. We feel sure that he will not come again, however, and as there are probably

not many weasels in our woods, we can't help feeling glad that one, at least, has been pretty well choked.

Another serious thing happened two days ago, which threatened to throw our little family into mourning. One of our children went out to gather some dry moss. Our beds had got matted up, and we must have nice fresh ones before winter. We each plucked some fur from our breasts, but grown Rabbits mix moss, furze, and fibre for their mattresses, which makes them soft enough. Only wee Bunnies need beds made entirely of fur, or fur and a few feathers.

Well, our poor little dear had been gone but a few minutes, when we heard the peculiar cry or bleat that means trouble for Bunnies. Now, I have never failed to caution the younger ones of our family to take a good look around first thing upon leaving the burrow, and to watch where they went.

But a frisky young creature of any kind is apt to be thoughtless and forgetful, and so our Spotty had gone capering out without a thought of harm, when lo! he all at once was in a hunter's snare. And it was almost certain that in an hour or two out would come the owner of the snare to see what he had caught.

With great caution, Mister Rabbit and Mother Bunny stepped around and stepped around, but

dear, dear! The trap was a stiff one. Just as soon as our poor Bunny was inside, down had come the spring, fastening him in as completely as if he were in a small prison, locked with iron padlock and key. If the remaining eight or seven of us were to jump on the bar that held down the spring, we could not move it one atom.

If only we had time, it might be that by taking turns at gnawing at the wooden bar, we might in a day or two get Spotty free. But what use to think of that?

He was the very handsomest child of all the six in our burrow; all mouse-color and white, with pinkish eyes and pretty ears, that looked as if lined with delicate white fur over pink silk. And an obliging, helpful creature he was, too, always the first to run if an errand was needed to be done, and I had only to say that the beds needed making over, when off hopped Spotty for the moss.

Alack! Aloo! What wonder poor little Mother Bunny sent up a Rabbit-wail that set all the others a-sighing.

Yet there was no time to waste in sorrow-sounds. So wiping away the tears with a small, dry paw, I set my wits to work.

Did not I tell you some time ago, Boy, that there was no other love in the world like mother-love? Yes. Well, now let me add that it would

be pretty hard to find wits that are much keener or quicker than the wits of a mother, especially when one of her precious children is in danger.

Be amused if you choose at what I did next. I went over by a tree, got up on my hind paws, leaned my head against the trunk, put my fore paws over my face, and fell a-thinking. Yes, be amused, Boy, if you like, but it really seemed to me that if I stood up like a man, and put on a thinking-cap, something might occur to me that would be a help.

I *did* catch an idea!

Running back to the burrow, I found a stout piece of cord, what you call "clothes-line," that I had picked up one day, and then made the rest of the family except Bunny White understand that they were to come with me over to the trap.

It set poor Spotty wild seeing us all trotting over on our toes to his prison. He tore about a few minutes, then laid down and flattened out in despair, his legs clutching the sides of the hateful trap. But going resolutely up to him, I soon made him see that there was something else I wanted him to clutch besides the wires of his prison.

I thrust an end of the rope into the trap, showing him I wanted him to take it in his teeth. Then I brought up the other five children, making them take the rope in their teeth all along the



“THE GAME WAS TO PULL THE TRAP OVER TO OUR
BURROW, AND GRADUALLY GNAW HIM FREE”

line. Mister Rabbit and Mother Bunny clutched it at the outside end. So we all had hold of it.

The game was to pull the trap over to our burrow, where we could feed Spotty well, and gradually gnaw him free. But ginger-e-e! If only the trap had been nearer our home, how thankful we should have been. But it was going to be quite a distance to drag it to the nearest entrance.

Yet what will not an affectionate family do to save one of its members from being carried away, sold, and kept a prisoner forever afterward! Now you will have to laugh, Boy, for laugh we had to, in spite of all our toil and trouble.

Spotty held the rope in his teeth, and we gave a long, strong pull. It was too much for the small fellow at one end. Out of his mouth flew the rope, and heels over head rolled Spotty to the far end of the trap. But it did not discourage him.

We tried again, Spotty not only holding the line in his mouth, but clutching at the wires with all four of his paws. Ah, that worked better! We actually started Spotty and his prison from the spot where it had rested half-hidden by brush and weeds.

We rested, took breath, then with a great "Up she comes!" off we started again. We went a little way, then over bounced two of the children, their toes getting tangled in the rope. Never mind,

we soon got them on their legs again. The next time we were to make a brave effort. And a brave effort it was!

Spotty held on with teeth and claws for dear life, and such a pull we made that really quite a little distance had been cleared, when we all at once came to a sharp hillock no one had been able to see.

Over and over turned the trap, over and over rolled Mister Rabbit, Mother Bunny, and the crowd of children. We all stood on our heads, pink toes in air, the rope took a fly on its own account, and we called ourselves — shipwrecked!

Yet in the midst of our funny topsy-turvy, there popped into Mother Bunny's head a remembrance that the time was short, oh, perhaps very short! So we hurried to find the rope, righted the trap, Spotty clutched and grabbed, we clutched and pulled.

Come, Boy, don't shake so. Why, if hearing tell of these things sets you off into such fits, I think you might have nearly burst with laughter had you been on the spot and seen the kick-ups and upsets we had, getting that ship to land, or, rather, getting that old trap into port, into our refuge under the rock. Once I saw Mister Rabbit go flying into the air. He struck a little stump so hard, and let go the rope so suddenly, that he shot up as if blown out of a pop-gun.

Well, we got trundled under the trap and over it. We tumbled all over each other, and got tied up in knots of trap, Bunnies, and rope! But never mind, we got Spotty to the entrance, and with one last, hard pull, we jerked trap and all into the burrow. And hurrah! we had rescued our Bunny-boy and — stolen a trap!

Mister Rabbit and two of the children went out and scattered leaves and tangle over a good bit of the path where the trap had dragged, so the sportsman could not trace it. I stayed with my child.

The next day we got Spotty out, and had spoiled the snare. Now we are going to gnaw the wood of the trap into fire-kindlings, cute and small, for smoking out weasels, foxes, and other fellows we do not care to receive as callers.

And we are still a united, happy family of nine free Bunnies. Hurrah!

CHAPTER X.

COME AGAIN

SO you go to the city to-morrow, Boy. Well, sorry as I shall be to miss your friendly young face, yet true it is that from now until Jack Frost locks things up with his cold, icy key, I shall have but very little time for stopping to talk.

Jack is around already. Nuts are falling "thick as rain." Corn-husks are piled in the field, weeds are getting stiff, and ho, for the busy boys that Bunnies of the woods must become nowadays!

Do you suppose we dread the winter? Indeed not! No more cozy, comfortable quarters could be found than our snug burrows, no matter how storms may rage above and around us.

That Great Book has good names in it. A "refuge" we have in very truth under the rock. Our scooped-out chambers underground are as fine for Bunnies as are your tall, heated houses for "people."

So while you are busy with those studies that

ought to make you the right kind of a man one of these days, you can imagine Mother Bunny hopping contentedly about, caring for her family, and receiving her friends.

You know we live for years. So when you see a Rabbit hopping about, either in the hutch or the woods, you need not suppose it must be a new young thing. It may have been living seven or eight years.

I made a visit the other night which did me a great deal of good. And it may make you feel happier about the Rabbits that live in private warrens if I describe the call.

Mister Rabbit and I have long wanted to pay a little visit to friends in our old hutch. Now you must know it is always a risk to go there, so very careful we were, I can assure you. We chose a cloudy night, and waited until it was pitch-dark before setting forth.

The journey through woods, across paths, and over to the hutch was taken in safety, and our old friends, as well as several new ones, were very glad to see us. And really they appeared well satisfied and happy. The warren had been made larger, there was quite a run from wire to wire, and it was pleasant to see so much cheerfulness and I thought contentment.

It is true that when we started to come away, there was a wild picking at the bars, as though

the sight of our freedom made them want to run far and wide and where they pleased. But they were a sleek, well-fed company, and as they all had been born in the warren, it was the best they knew.

Mister Rabbit and Mother Bunny decided, however, that they would not often visit the hutch. It shows our friends the difference between being behind wires and outside of them, and it is of no use to do that.

Afterwards, we called with much caution on a family of Bunnies, where the father, mother, and several children had all been captured in the woods. We did not enjoy that visit very much. Don't ever capture wild creatures, Boy, and then fancy they will enjoy being household pets. "There is no such thing in the book" — that must mean the book of Nature.

If you must have a Bunny, a squirrel, or a bird, get one that has always lived in a hutch, crate, or cage.

Now we are packing our storerooms just as fast as we can pack. We are putting in smart work around grapevines among other things, as grape-stalks keep sweet and sappy a long time. By piling them in heaps, we keep them fresh and juicy, that is, as juicy as we ever want anything to be.

We are a jolly set when snow comes twirling

down. Then is the time for house-parties that last a week at a time. The journeys to and fro are risky affairs, far more so than in the summer-time. No protecting leaves to hide under, no gray stones to roll ourselves beneath, and look "all of a piece," no soft turf or moss to help conceal us.

Isn't it droll — we enjoy the trips all the more for that! But we take no long ones, such as the journey to my grandchildren's. Perhaps once or twice through the winter the young Bunnies venture on a long trip, but never in fresh snow, or after a thaw.

But after snow has grown soiled, and has a gray tinge, then the youngsters sometimes dare take quite a long hop, when we are always delighted to see them.

Do you suppose the woods are dreary when his lordship Jack Frost and her ladyship the Snow Queen are abroad? They might be for you, Boy, but they are not for us. I have many a time slipped outside the burrow for a few moments on a winter's day, and just listened.

Owls would go flapping and hooting by, and to us there is nothing doleful in their cry. Far overheard such a chattering and cracking of nuts as the squirrels are keeping up! Seed-pods are snapping open with the pop of little pistols from the frost, and winter birds, chick-a-dee, snow-bird,

and sparrows, are flying and chirping in every direction.

I have seen moles darting about, mice capering by on swift little toes, and once in awhile the bark of a fox has made me feel sure that Reynard is hurrying off to a warm hole somewhere in the deep woods.

So remember we are all watched over, and do not worry when the storms and the sleet come pouncing down, and wonder what the Forest Boys will do then, poor things.

In burrows, nests, and hollows, in tree, rock, and ground, we dwell in safety.

Dear little Bunny White is never happier than when winter weather and the Storm King hold rule. She says we are all secure, all in the burrow, with no wanderers abroad to worry over. There is scarcely any danger that a bold, unwelcome guest will give trouble. They are for the most part keeping to their own quarters, and, like ourselves, taking but few trips over the frozen ground.

What is it you are trying to make me understand, Boy? Oh, you needn't thank me for telling my story. You have been finding health and strength in the fair, sweet country, and if Mother Bunny has been able to teach you anything worth knowing, she is only very glad to have had the chance.

Don't forget the few lessons. Take advice from one of a "feeble folk," and be afraid of nothing but doing wrong. I could teach you almost nothing, for, my goodness me, Boy! if the Conies and the Bunnies can find out about the rocks that are their refuge, and if the tiny ants are taught to build houses and lay out streets, what must "people" know!

There must be a wonderful Something back of every living creature in the world. I think its name may be "*Love!*"

Good-by, Boy; good-by, dear. Don't forget little Mother Bunny. And sometime when the city gets hot again, and the cool, sweet woods are calling, and all the free, woodland creatures are inviting, "Come Again!"

THE END.

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